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# WASTE MANAGEMENT AND UPCYCLING

By Katarina Brieditis and Katarina Evans



Top left: Waste from sweaters, buttons, zips, tags, labels. Top right: Making of the Re Rag Rug - Kasuri - in India.



All material is good material, you only need to create ways to use it.

Re Rag Rug started as an experimental design project to explore the social and ecological factors of turning waste material into rugs.

It's an example of how design can work with sustainability, and adding value to seemingly worthless material. Many of its rugs are made with craft techniques that don't require large spaces or machines, and can therefore be manufactured as cottage industries in textile producing countries. Such a production, using waste is ecologically sustainable and, at the same time, socially sustainable - as the production becomes a platform for developing crafts and creating jobs.

Throughout history there has been a need to recycle material, whether out of economical or creative reasons. Only in recent times have we forgotten how to make use of the waste material in our close surroundings.

Excess material from the T-shirt industry made into yarns.

RE RAG RUG / STUDIO BRIEDITIS & EVANS

Since 1980 the world population has grown from four and a half billion to over seven billion, and each one of us have doubled our consumption of textile fibres during the same period. One third of these fibres are cotton. Today three percent of the earth's cultivated areas are used for growing cotton and cotton accounts for 10 percent of all chemicals used in fibre production. Needless to say, the Earth is suffering and we need to learn how to re-use the materials already around us.

When launching Re Rag Rug we wanted to challenge ourselves as designers by creating products using existing materials.

Our material comes to us in random forms. A pile of old sweaters, a box of silk ties or discarded T-shirts. The colour palette is already there, limited but full of possibilities. We never have to start creating from a blank piece of paper or wait for inspiration. With our hands on the material we start constructing and use all our collected knowledge and intuition to find new expressions.

The method of using pre-existing forms or products, and placing them in a new context, jump starts our creativity. It leads us into a process where we can be innovative. By doing this we gain new ways of working and communicating and new designs for rugs.

Many producers would like to find a way for their specific waste to be given more value, out of economical reasons as well as environmental. An industry that works in close collaboration with creative designers would result in more sustainable products, as well as more innovative designs and future business models.

So what about all the textiles we choose to throw away? We can all re-use and recycle our clothes. However, in a larger context, the abundance of discarded clothes that end up as waste or landfill is another challenge and we need to find ways to recycle clothes in a larger scale. Recycling and waste management is already developed in other fields, such as glass, paper and metal. In Sweden the waste

management industry has increased by 60 percent since 2000, creating many jobs with it.

Designing and creating products from the waste from another process offers unique possibilities for the development of the handicraft industry, with a richer and more varied range of products and services.

Industry and crafts can co-exist, preferably in the same geographic areas as the waste material is generated. Using waste products for handicraft results in less overall wastage, flexibility in production and adds more value due to the unique nature of the products.

**“We design and make innovative, experimental handmade rugs, out of materials considered worthless”**

Our first year resulted in 12 unique rugs, or prototypes, which are now a travelling exhibition. Since then we have continued to develop our ideas into a small-scale handicraft production using waste and excess where it is generated.

Our own production of rugs and other textile products are made out of the excess from the T-shirt industry in India. We are also exploring the possibility of production in Sweden using discarded T-shirts that would otherwise be burnt as waste.

Re Rag Rug is now collaborating with two weaving factories, where selvedge (the self-finished edge of a fabric to stop it fraying) is a wasted by-product. We like the challenge of elevating material considered worthless, adding design and handicraft skills to create a product of high value.

Waste is a resource that should be considered as good as any virgin material - and creative design is the tool!

For more information on Re Rag Rug, visit: [reragrug.blogspot.hk](http://reragrug.blogspot.hk)